

[*Laughter*] Thank you all for coming. *Taoiseach*, thank you very much, sir. Secretary of State of Northern Ireland, Dr. Reid; First Minister Trimble; Deputy First Minister Mallon—thank you all for being here.

I want to thank the Ambassadors who are here. I want to thank the other leaders from Northern Ireland who are here. It's most gracious of you to take your time to come and celebrate Saint Patrick's Day with us. Mr. Speaker, it's good to see you again, sir, as well.

The *Taoiseach* and I just had an excellent meeting. We spent a good hour of frank dialog. He gave me Dublin's perspective on the peace process in Northern Ireland, just as Prime Minister Blair gave me London's perspective when we met last month. An Irish proverb tell us that a friend's eye is a good mirror. And I can tell you that what is striking about my meetings with both Prime Ministers is how similar their perspectives are, how optimistic they are, and how determined they are.

It is clear that all sides want the Good Friday agreement to succeed. It is also clear that all sides are seeking to overcome very difficult internal obstacles and to keep up forward momentum. The agreement negotiated by both Prime Ministers in Belfast last week is a reflection of a common commitment. As always, we deeply appreciate the efforts.

And again, I want to pledge what I said yesterday: The United States stands ready to help. It is in our national interest that there be a lasting peace, a real, lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

I also want to say how much I appreciate the contributions that Irish-Americans have made to the cause of peace. Many of you are right here in this room, and our Nation thanks you. By supporting those committed to a peaceful approach, you're truly giving something back to your native land.

Today is also about celebrating what Irish-Americans have given to their adopted land. The White House itself was designed by an Irish-American. This fact about America's home is symbolic of the contributions made by millions of Irish of both Catholic and Protestant persuasion.

Your industry and talent and imagination have enriched our commerce and enriched

our culture. The strong record of public service has fortified our democracy, and the strong ties to family and faith and community have strengthened our Nation's character. In short, the Irish are a big reason why we'll always be proud to call ourselves a nation of immigrants.

Happy Saint Patrick's Day.

And now, would you join us, please, for some refreshments in the State Room.

Welcome to the White House.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:38 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to United Kingdom Secretary of State for Northern Ireland John Reid; and First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, Northern Ireland Executive.

### **Message on the Observance of Saint Patrick's Day, 2001**

*March 16, 2001*

I am pleased to send warm greetings to those celebrating St. Patrick's Day. Each year on March 17, joyous events commemorate the remarkable life of Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Born in Britain many centuries ago, Patrick was captured as a teenager by pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland. During six years of forced labor as a herdsman, he looked to his religious faith for sustenance.

Patrick eventually escaped and returned to Britain, where he dreamed that he was being called to serve as a missionary. He began to study for the priesthood and returned to Ireland, dedicating his life to preaching Christianity. Patrick endured hardship and suffering, but his bravery and devotion to his faith became legendary in the hearts and minds of the Irish people.

Centuries later, St. Patrick's Day pays tribute to an incredible hero and to the rich cultural heritage of the Emerald Isle. Countless Americans symbolically proclaim Irish ancestry by taking part in the festivities celebrating the stories and traditions of Ireland. St. Patrick's Day is also a time to honor the contributions of Irish Americans to our Nation's history and way of life, enriching the United States in great measure.

As we move into the 21st century, Americans look forward to continued friendship and goodwill with the people of Ireland. Laura joins me in sending best wishes for a wonderful St. Patrick's Day.

**George W. Bush**

**Remarks to Small-Business Owners**  
*March 16, 2001*

Thank you all for coming. Be seated. [Laughter] Madame Secretary, thank you very much for the kind introduction. I want to welcome you all to the White House, the people's house. I can't tell you what an honor it is to live here. It's been a fantastic experience for me and Laura and our family, and we take our responsibilities seriously.

I want to welcome you. I want to welcome the entrepreneurs of America. First, I want to recognize Hector Baretto, who is the nominee for the Small Business Administration—Hector—and president of the Utah State Senate, Al Mansell, is here, as well. Al, thank you for coming.

Before I introduce the folks behind me, I'd like to say something about commonsense budgeting, something you get to do every day, something our Federal Government ought to do with your money. And that is, take a commonsense approach about what we do with the people's money. And it means setting priorities, understanding whose money it is we're spending. And the best way to do this is to say, what are our priorities?

Education is a priority, and we need to focus on education. But I also remember where I came from. It's one thing to spend money at the Federal level; it's another thing to make sure we understand how to achieve educational excellence for every child. And that means trusting local folks to chart the path to excellence. The people who care more about the children in a respective community are the people who live in the community. And so while we'll focus some Federal resources, we need to trust the local people by passing power out of Washington, DC, to run their public schools in America, and at the same time, we've got to insist upon results.

You do that every single day with your businesses. The Federal Government ought to start doing that, as well. And so we're going to say, "There's more money for you but show us whether or not children are learning to read and write and add and subtract. You measure, you show us so that not one single child gets left behind."

Another priority is the defense of the country. It's a solemn, solemn task of the President to keep the peace, which means we've got to prioritize spending in the military. And it starts with making sure we pay our troops more money. And so my budget says, there's more money for those who wear the uniform and better housing for those who wear the uniform and taking care of the veterans, for those who used to wear the uniform.

Another priority is health care. We've got a plan to take care of the working uninsured by refundable tax credits. We double the Medicare budget over a 10 year period of time. Another priority is to make sure that the Social Security system is safe and secure. And it starts with spending the Social Security money on only one thing—Social Security.

So this is a budget that I submitted that sets priorities. It increases what's called discretionary spending by 4 percent. That's enough to fund our priorities and keep our commitments without overburdening working folks and small-business owners. Now, part of the consternation here in Washington is that I don't want to spend as much money as they used to spend up here. By setting priorities and focusing and remembering whose money it is we're spending, I think we can slow the rate of growth down.

You see, at the end of last time, the last session, discretionary spending increased 8 percent. That's a lot, particularly when you're talking in terms of trillions. And so we've said, "Let's be responsible with the people's money. Let's focus, let's meet needs, but let's always remember whose money it is in the first place."

There is a lot of discussion about debt reduction, and that's a worthy discussion. The budget I submitted pays down \$2 trillion in debt. That's all the debt that's coming due over the next 10 years—that's \$2 trillion over